



**American
Red Cross**

Connecticut Blood Services Region

Testimony of Dr. Mary O'Neill 03-12-2010

Senator Harris, Representative Ritter and Members of the Public Health Committee, I am Dr. Mary O'Neill, Vice President of the American Red Cross – Northeast Division, a position which I have held since 2004. I am an M.D. and am board certified in Anatomical Pathology, Clinical Pathology and Blood Banking/Transfusion Medicine. I have also served as Red Cross Medical Director for over ten years.

I oversee five blood regions in seven states, including Connecticut. Connecticut has always been one of our strongest blood regions and benefits from the support it receives from hospitals, Red Cross Chapters, local media and legislators. My primary responsibilities include having a safe environment for blood donors and staff, ensuring an adequate blood supply that is as safe as possible, and maintaining fiscal responsibility. I specifically want to address the proposed requirement to have nurses at all blood drives.

I urge you not to enact legislation to require a nurse at every blood drive, which is beyond the requirements of the FDA and our own high standards of performance. I ask this for two reasons:

1. The unavailability of nurses.
2. The costs associated with this requirement.

We currently face a nationwide shortage of RN's. According to Public Health records, Connecticut is ranked as #7 in nursing shortage estimates with a deficit of 11,100 nurses, and is estimated to have the second worst nursing shortage in the nation by 2015. The inability to hire nurses to meet the requirements of this proposed legislation would lead us to base the number of blood drives on the number of available nurses. This is clearly not sustainable.

The requirement for nurses would also increase costs, which would negatively impact our operations in Connecticut. Out of 36 Red Cross Regions, Connecticut is now the fourth highest in costs to collect blood. If costs continue to rise, I will have to consider a number of options, including increasing collections in other less costly states which would require moving jobs out of

Connecticut. This is a decision I do not take lightly. I prefer to be growing collections in a cost effective means and not considering taking jobs out of Connecticut.

The Red Cross has an obligation to its hospitals and their patients to keep costs as low as possible. Collection costs are shared by hospitals. Despite enjoying an excellent relationship with the Red Cross, St. Raphael Hospital of New Haven now purchases their blood products at a lower cost from out of state. Losing hospitals to other blood banks reduces jobs in Connecticut.

As a physician I have the highest respect for nurses and would encourage nurses to apply for open positions. However, the valuable skills and qualities that nurses have are not required at blood drives to ensure donor safety and may result in fewer blood drives/and or increased costs.

Either scenario would require me to move jobs out of Connecticut. I ask you to continue supporting the lifesaving mission of the Connecticut Region by not adding this unnecessary requirement concerning the operation of blood drives in the state.